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ABSTRACT

A conference on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information by Local Educational Agencies was held at the National Institute of Education (NIE) July 14-16, 1974. The recommendations developed at the conference focus on identified needs for: a clear definition of the term promising practices; a leadership role by NIE; a plan of action to coordinate resources; development of a common, user-oriented format for local educational agencies; selection processes and criteria for promising educational practices; a cooperative network for development, validation, and dissemination of promising practices information; a state-of-the-art study; and exploration of the goals and criteria for evaluating dissemination activities. Also included are the suggested roles that NIE, local and state agencies, and information centers will need to assume, observations by Contemporary Research, Inc. regarding additional steps that might be considered, and the usefulness of the conference as a joint-planning process. (Author/PF)

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INCREASING THE USE OF PROMISING PRACTICES INFORMATION BY LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

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The document presents the recommendations developed during the NIE Conference on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information by Local Education Agencies. The conference was conducted for the National Institute of Education by Contemporary Research, Inc., July 14-16, 1974, in Los Angeles, California.

Recommendations focus on identified needs for:

- a clear definition of the term promising practices
- NIE to assume a leadership role in partnership with local education agencies, State education agencies and information centers
- a plan of action to coordinate resources
- development of a common, user-oriented, format for local education agencies
- selection processes and criteria for promising education practices
- a cooperative network for development, validation and dissemination of promising practices information
- a state-of-the-art study as a prerequisite to long-range planning
- exploration of the goals and criteria for evaluating dissemination activities

Also included are the implications for the suggested roles that NIE, local and state education agencies and information centers will need to assume. A final section discusses observations and suggestions by Contemporary Research regarding additional steps that might be considered, and the usefulness of the conference as a joint-planning process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contemporary Research, Inc. (CRI) would like to express its appreciation to the National Institute of Education for the opportunity to conduct this conference on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information, and especially for the opportunity of working with the conference participants.

CRI is indebted to the participants who provided us with extensive background information on the problems, and willingly took on the task of developing the recommendations presented in this document.

The conference would not have been possible without the individual talents and involvement of the conference facilitators: Dr. Howard Adelman, Mr. Ron Lopez, Ms. Diane Watson, and Dr. Asa Hilliard. Conference coordination was very capably managed by Phyllis Karr of CRI.

Individuals who provided invaluable technical assistance during the preparation of the final report include Dr. Howard Adelman, Conference Facilitator, Pat Kramer, Sally Cliff, and Marvinia Hunter of CRI; and Mr. Richard Elmendorf, NIE Project Monitor from the Office of Dissemination and Resources.

Jana S. Johnson,
Project Manager

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT		iii
LIST OF EXHIBITS		v
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	The Conference	2
	The Report	4
II.	THE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS: PRIORITIES FOR ACTION	6
	Overview of the Issues	6
	New Efforts	9
	Recommendations	11
	Introduction	11
	A Joint Plan of Action	13
	User-Oriented Information	14
	The Selection of Promising Practices to Match LEA Needs	19
	Training for LEA Staff	24
	A Cooperative Network	26
	State-of-the-Art Study	31
	Evaluation of the Impact of Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information	33
	Analysis	36
	The Nature of the Recommendations	36
	Roles and Responsibilities	36
	Additional Implications for Implementation	41
III.	CRI OBSERVATIONS	43
	Suggestions	43
	Conclusion	46
APPENDIX		A-1

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit		Page
1.	Conference Agenda on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information	3
2.	Overview of Recommendations for NIE Action	12
3.	Suggested Elements for a Common Format . .	16
4.	Categories for Promising Practices Information.	20
5.	NIE's Relationship with Various Agencies in Developing a Cooperative Network	27
6.	Workshop Planning Matrix for Developing a State Model.	29

I. INTRODUCTION

On July 14-16, 1974, the National Institute of Education (NIE) held an invitational conference in Los Angeles, California, on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information by Local Education Agencies. Local educators, State education agency staff and information services specialists were invited from across the United States. The purpose of the conference was to identify factors that currently prevent the increased use of promising practices information, and to recommend strategies NIE could pursue to increase the utilization of the information by practicing educators.

NIE held this conference within the context of its legislative mandate to improve educational practice, to build a capability among local schools for renewal and reform, and to build an effective educational research and development system. NIE's consequent responsibility for the dissemination of educational knowledge includes a concern for information about educational practices developed by local schools.

Accordingly, NIE sought to incorporate the knowledge and concerns of representatives from all levels of the nation's educational system at the start of its program planning efforts in this area. The NIE conference actively involved a representative consumer group in mutual problem identification and needs assessment, and in determining the role NIE should assume in facilitating the increased use of promising practices information.

NIE invited 40 participants from the following agencies who were considered to have first-hand knowledge of the problem in an operational sense:

- Local education agencies (LEA's)
- State education agencies (SEA's)
- Information centers and services working directly with local educators.

In addition to staff from NIE's Office of Dissemination and Resources, Federal program specialists from the U.S. Office of Education also attended. A list of all participants, with their organizational affiliation and titles, appears in the Appendix.

The participants from the field represented the essential constituency with whom NIE will need to work as it becomes more directly involved in improving the dissemination and utilization of promising practices. An important characteristic of all conference participants, and of the LEA's in particular, was their evident leadership in the forefront of educational change. The conference recommendations are thus based on judgment of a highly informed, aware, sensitive group as to what could make a difference in the current state of the art of dissemination and utilization of promising practices information.

Contemporary Research, Incorporated (CRI) was asked to conduct the conference and serve as the facilitator responsible for all conference and travel arrangements, for preparation of a pre-conference working paper outlining concerns and issues, and for the design and management of the conference workshops. A summary of information from the working paper, and a brief description of the facilitators backgrounds are included in the Appendix.

CRI's most critical task, represented by this report, has been to provide both NIE decision-makers and professionals in the field with the issues, concerns and priorities developed at the conference, in order that they could be incorporated into planning activities for the coming year.

The Conference

In place of a formal agenda, the conference was characterized by a partially structured format designed to focus discussions in small group workshops (see Exhibit 1). No issue papers were read by experts, to which participants could respond, nor were there panel discussions before large groups.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Sunday Evening: Orientation Session

Monday & Tuesday:

Session I: Needs Assessment

- Problem Definition: What Factors Hinder the Use of Promising Practices Information
- Assessment of Resources and Relationships for Dealing with the Problem

Session II: Development of a Plan of Action

- Development of Strategies for Facilitating the Use of Promising Practices Information
- Priorities for Implementing Strategies
- Definition of Critical Roles in Implementation for LEA's, SEA's, Information Centers -- and NIE

Exhibit I. Conference Agenda on Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information

In order to most effectively utilize the wide diversity of experience and perspectives of participants, CRI utilized a workshop approach in which participants were divided into four small groups with representatives from different organizational levels and geographic areas. The small group discussions were designed to fully access and utilize the knowledge, experience, and creativity of each individual, in order to develop the requested report. During the conference each group was asked to begin by defining the problems that hinder the use of promising practices information and to identify and assess resources and strategies that could overcome the problems. From this framework, further discussion led to the development of specific recommendations that could be presented to NIE for consideration in its planning.

In order to provide leadership and direction to the groups, CRI provided four experienced facilitators who were eminently qualified to interact with the participants as peers. They were: Dr. Howard Adelman, Director of the Fernald School, U.C.L.A.; Dr. Asa Hilliard, Dean of Education, San Francisco State University; Mr. Ron Lopez, Senior Consultant, Contemporary Research, Inc., and Diane Watson, Senior Consultant, Contemporary Research, Inc.

As a result of the joint effort toward problem solving and strategy planning, the conference not only produced a set of recommendations, but also a sharing of information and perspectives; i.e., immediate dissemination among participants. The open interaction and subsequent understanding of each other's roles and problems was clearly essential to the effectiveness of the information exchange.

The Report

CRI's concept of the conference report is that it should be useful not only to NIE and conference participants, but also to other individuals and agencies involved in the development, dissemination, or use of promising practices information.

The conference report was prepared from the tapes and notes of the individual workshops and from participant's written recommendations.

and from analysis of the manner in which participants proceeded to meet the conference objectives. The report thus reflects an integration and synthesis of the diversity of perspectives provided by participants, as well as the consensus that emerged about particular problem areas.

As the conference progressed, awareness developed among all participants that the complexity of the problem and time constraints precluded the conference or report from identifying and resolving all the problems related to the use of promising practices information. It therefore became apparent that additional conferences and workshops are necessary to adequately explore this whole area.

The remainder of the report has been divided into two major sections. Section Two, Conference Recommendations: Priorities for Action presents an overview of some of the problems related to increasing the use of promising practices information, and then presents and discusses the recommendations which resulted. The recommendations focus on NIE's leadership role in partnership with the field, and on the need for a plan to coordinate resources. The specific areas a plan of action needs to address include: definition of promising practices and of the information about them needed by the users; the development of a common user-oriented format; consistent selection processes and criteria; State-level networks for coordinating information development, validation and dissemination activities.

This section concludes with an analysis of the implications that these recommendations have, in terms of the relationships and roles of major components in the "system" -- NIE, the SEA's, LEA's, information centers and services, and universities.

Section Three, CRI Observations, provides some additional suggestions CRI believes are indicated from the priorities identified by the conference, and some conclusions concerning the usefulness of the conference, and the value of efforts to increase the use of promising practices information.

II. THE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The Overview which appears below defines some of the problems and issues that resulted in this conference being held for NIE and attempts to provide the reader with a frame of reference generally shared by those at the conference. Following the Overview are the recommendations developed by the four workshop groups. Some of the recommendations were independently reached by more than one group as one of several priorities; other groups developed a single recommendation which represented their major concern. The section concludes with the implications for implementing the recommendations, particularly the roles NIE, the States, information centers, local education agencies and universities would need to assume.

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

"Promising practices" is the term currently used to include teaching and school management strategies, curricula or teacher materials, and comprehensive educational progams that have been developed and used by local schools to improve education, and that are now potentially disseminable to other schools.

The conference topic was the use of the information about promising practices. "Use" in this context was generally agreed to include any level of information use, from scanning to get ideas, to considering whether to adopt a new program based on all the available information related to it.

The lack of case studies and documented experience in this area hinder an accurate, substantiated overview of the problems related to increasing the use of promising practices. The recommendations in some ways are as much strategies for clarifying and organizing the problems as anything else. Were they to be implemented, a much clearer picture of the problems experienced by LEA's in the use of promising practices information would exist on which to base sound strategies for increasing use.

However, with the recognition of how little is yet known, and of the generalizations that exist, this overview outlines briefly some general perceptions of the problems and issues, in order to provide the reader with a frame of reference generally shared by those at the conference.

A basic assumption by professionals involved in this field is that practicing educators most often look to other schools for solutions to their educational problems. For most local educators this search is assumed to be confined largely to schools nearest their own. Accidental access to an approach being implemented at some distance may occur through personal contact at conferences, or through various professional journal articles. Constraints of time and money are obvious limitations on seeking out information. Other constraints, not so obvious, may be the traditional autonomy of each school district which tends to reduce incentives for adopting new practices from the "outside", and the need for personal contact with people who can provide accurate information about a given practice. As yet there are only scattered information services and centers collecting and disseminating such information to LEA's; therefore, a general picture of the uses, and value of such information by a representative range of LEA's is lacking.

Most LEA staff, therefore, have difficulty gaining access to information about promising practices even in their own region, or at State or national levels. In these States or regions where an information system now exists, collecting the information that is accessible does not automatically lead to use. The user's problem or need usually requires refinement through interpersonal "inquiry negotiation", in order to receive the most appropriate information. During adaption of a particular approach, specific technical assistance for needs assessments, and for staff training may be necessary in order for the information to be utilized and thus affect actual classroom practices.

A national file or information bank for promising practices information does not exist at present. The Educational Resources Information Centers (ERIC) system cannot easily be used to collect and retrieve promising practices information. According to conference participants, many local educators have "never heard" of ERIC, and those who have do not know how to use its resources in their program planning. A number of states now possess collections of promising practices, usually as an outgrowth of Title III, ESEA efforts; however, the problems of managing such information, and how to increase its use by LEA's were among the concerns that led to the conference.

The complexity of the local education agency requires that types of users and levels of use must first be identified before an understanding of how to increase "use" can be gained. Teachers, building principals, and superintendents all have different needs and different information-seeking behaviors. It is apparent that increased use will occur as the internal LEA procedures for establishing educational objectives, assessing needs, and determining where changes are required, become more effective; and as the internal resistance to change on the part of teachers and administrators is replaced by an on-going participation in decision-making.

Whether or not promising practices should remain in a separate category or categories from the products of educational laboratories and centers is still an open question. One aspect that does separate them from other educational programs is the difficulty surrounding their identification and selection, and the production of descriptions. There are seldom resources or incentives for the local educator to evaluate or validate his program, or to prepare materials necessary for its dissemination. Educators charged with the responsibility for information dissemination do not have a ready-made supply of descriptors to select from, nor is there any agreement as to the standards

such programs should meet. The problems of identification, insuring adequate descriptions and screening out programs having minimal value, are unresolved. Other unresolved issues include whether promising practices are being selected that indeed meet the needs of local education agencies. Does the lack of quality control procedures result in LEA's not using the available information? Should only validated programs that have "hard" evidence of success be disseminated?

A strong feeling, expressed particularly by LEA's at the conference, was that the available promising practices information is not "useful" for several reasons: 1) the descriptions are not fitted to the consumer's needs so that they can be easily accessed and compared at an initial interest level; 2) the information is not organized and accessible in terms of what LEA's know, and want to know; the potential consumer is left with too many unanswered questions; 3) the description of the practice often relies on research results and language, and becomes an immediate "turn-off" to many potential consumers.

New Efforts

One problem for policy planners is caused by the recency of programs and services in this area. State-level efforts and the creation of information centers to directly meet LEA needs have come about only in the last five years, and until now there has been little possibility of documenting the knowledge that has been gained.

A number of State education agencies are beginning to develop a comprehensive approach to the identification and collection of information about promising educational practices, and are moving beyond the concept of information dissemination to providing technical assistance in needs assessment and implementation (included in the concept of "diffusion"). Although in most States dissemination is still viewed as a function only of the Title III, ESEA program, those at the conference represented examples of the potential development of the SEA's role across all programs.

New information centers and services have emerged, some in conjunction with the ERIC Clearinghouses (such as the Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education Assistance Center at Ohio State University) or in relation to curriculum, particularly in vocational education. The most significant new concept is the local or regional information center that links local schools to national data banks (ERIC, and other social science research collections), and maintains its own collections of educational resources and practices. The San Mateo Educational Resource Center (SMERC) in California, the Board of Cooperative Educational Services in northern Colorado, the Research and Information Services for Education Center (RISE) in Pennsylvania, and the Educational Resource Centers operated by cooperating school districts in Merrimack, Massachusetts, and New Haven, Connecticut, represented this new type of institution at the conference. These local centers sell various information services to subscriber school districts and work with resource specialists who are part of the local school staff. They are now becoming partly or entirely sustained by direct local funds, although most began with Federal grants.

These activities and programs represent a rich source of empirical knowledge about the use of promising practices information, and about the factors that can facilitate increased use. One major purpose of holding the conference was to incorporate this information into program planning for this area, as it is not yet available except from individuals involved in day-to-day operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The conference attempted to understand the factors that hinder the increased use of promising practices information from the local educator's point of view, as he seeks information to resolve problems. The recommendations grew out of the initial discussions of problems from this user perspective, and from the point of view of those involved directly in responding to user needs.

The effort to arrive at priority issues prevented specification of much detail in the recommendations. If additional time had been available, the conference could have spelled out many more strategies, and identified specific criteria and processes. These recommendations then, define the major national priorities which NIE and the field together should address. The discussions are intended to give the major considerations and concerns that led to their formation.

The Overview of Priority Issues and Recommendations on the following page (Exhibit 2) illustrates the relationship between these factors identified as hindering increased use, and the recommended actions.

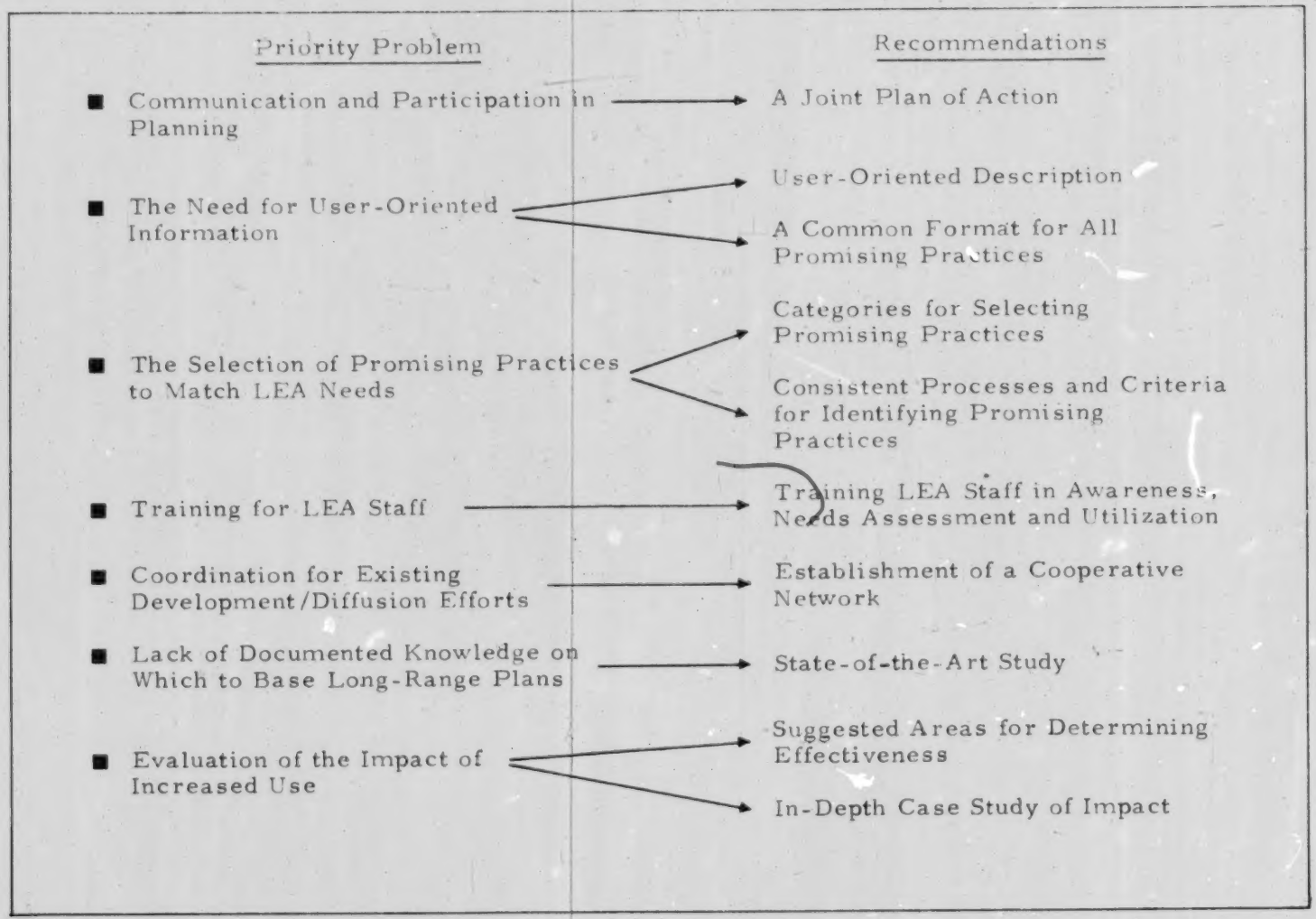
Priority Problem
Recommendations
Communication and Participation in Planning
A Joint Plan of Action
The Need for User-Oriented Information
User-Oriented Description
A Common Format for All Promising Practices
The Selection of Promising Practices to Match LEA Needs
Categories for Selecting Promising Practices
Consistent Processes and Criteria for Identifying Promising Practices
Training for LEA Staff
Training LEA Staff in Awareness, Needs Assessment and Utilization
Coordination for Existing Development/Diffusion Efforts
Establishment of a Cooperative Network
Lack of Documented Knowledge on Which to Base Long-Range Plans
State-of-the-Art Study
Evaluation of the Impact of Increased Use
Suggested Areas for Determining Effectiveness
In-Depth Case Study of Impact

Exhibit 2. Overview of Recommendations for NIE Action

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A Joint Plan of Action

Recommendation:

NIE should develop and share with the conference participants and others a plan of action for efforts to increase the use of promising practices information, which involves all levels of the education system in its implementation.

Evolving from the conference was a strong request that NIE develop and share a plan of action for improving the developing, dissemination and utilization of promising practices information. A committment to this shared plan of action was identified as the first step toward a strong leadership role by NIE.

NIE's ability to communicate what it is capable of doing this year is essential to the development and the encouragement of this partnership. Participants recognized that vast funding resources were not essential elements for NIE's leadership; rather, honest communication and trust were identified as the necessary ingredients in such a relationship. But more than communication is necessary; participants requested an active participation in which stragegies can be jointly developed. The conference pointed out that the constituency that NIE could work with already exists and is willing to take an active part in improving the dissemination and utilization of promising practices information.

Participants expressed willingness to continue to work in partnership with NIE, even if resources are lacking for the implementation of specific recommendations. Participants viewed the conference as a positive, initial step, and expressed a desire that this type of communication and information sharing continue on a regular basis.

This concern for partnership emerged as a central issue at the conference, and was seen as the focal point from which a joint plan of action could be developed. As a result, the recommendations that follow spell out the specific areas that the plan of action might address. They are by no means all-inclusive, but they focus on those areas of concern which conference participants agreed had the greatest priority for increasing the use of promising practices information.

User-Oriented Information

Recommendations:

1. Program and product description formats should be based on items LEA's need in order to consider alternative programs and practices.

2. NIE should assume a leadership role in the development and implementation of a standardized format for information about promising practices.

Matching the information to LEA concerns and problems as teachers and administrators understand them remains a priority. The workshop discussions served to emphasize that despite the consensus that the information should be user-oriented, much more work needs to be done.

Describing What LEA's Want to Know. In order for information to be used, it must impact on the consumer as being useful. Throughout the conference, examples were offered of information that LEA's consider most useful when considering a promising practice. The summarization which follows is based on the insights and statements of these participants.

LEA's clearly dislike sales pitches and descriptions written in glowing terms, which: 1) give a distorted picture of what the practice is really about and, 2) often avoid mentioning the specific problem for which the practice was developed. Practicing educators appear to look first at whether a program or practice matches their problem in enough respects to have "promise" of being useful. Questions such as, "What type of community was it used in?" "How much time and money were involved?" reflect the nature of the initial questions LEA's ask.

A second major type of information LEA's want very early in the process are "user reactions," that state good and bad points, constraints encountered, and the initial user's feelings as to whether or not the program was successful. At present, local educators rely on peer evaluations and comments as being more helpful and comprehensive than the type of evaluative data usually available.

One major problem in describing what local educators want to know is to recognize the different levels of information needs within LEA's, and to develop descriptions tailored to teachers, principals, superintendent's staff, and community advisory groups.

A Common Format for Promising Practices. One of the most common reasons given at the conference for LEA's not using promising practices information is the lack of a standardized format which would readily permit LEA staff to access the information and which would allow information to be readily transferred among States and various information centers. This problem of locating what is available could be alleviated by developing a standardized format which would reduce some of the frustration involved in the dissemination/utilization/adaption of promising practices.

Perhaps the most far-reaching implication of the common format is the educational potential for "standardizing" locally-developed promising practices. The major purpose of the format is to provide comparable descriptions, but the conference foresaw that implementing a common format would lead to an evolutionary change in the quality and comprehensiveness of the materials produced. In this manner, the format would encourage the development of a consensus among local educators about what a promising educational approach should be.

A working concept of what a standardized format should include was developed by one workshop, and is shown here as Exhibit 3. The format is divided into two parts. Part I consists of information in the form of a brief abstract that a consumer could see as part of an initial search. It is designed to enhance the LEA's access to the types of programs that are available. After completing the initial search, if more information is desired, the requestor could then ask for further information, identified in Part II of the format which is designed to enable the potential user to gather and compare data needed for adoption or adaption of a particular practice.

PART I

- Type of Activity/Practice
- Date Produced
- Is the Program Still in Use?
- Specific Descriptors (ERIC Model)
- Narrative/Abstract

PART II

- Institution Identification
- Name and Phone No. of Key Contact(s)
- Funding Source
- Program Components
- Problem Areas Addressed by Program
- Program Goals
- Pertinent Value Orientations
- Characteristics of Target Population
- Characteristics of Program Integrity
  - -- Systematic/Technological (e.g., Teaching Methods)
  - -- Personnel/Personal (Personalities as well as Professional)
  - -- Time/Money
  - -- Community/Contextual
  - -- Social/Personal Value Biases
  - Baseline Data -- Available Measure for | Adapters | Adopters
  - Test of Integrity of Use
- Contrast with Standard Practices
- Materials Available about Program (e.g., Evaluations)
- Materials Required for Program
- Type of Evaluation
- Evidence of Success
- Visitation Rights
- Morale Factors

Exhibit 3. Suggested Elements for a Common Format

Many of the components of the format are self-explanatory, but some present new concepts that emerged in response to the question, "What do LEA's really need to know?" In Part I, the question, "Is the Program Still in Use?" was included in order that the potential user could answer such questions as: Can it still be viewed? When was it initiated? This was of primary interest to LEA's. The specific descriptors in Part I might be similar to those used in ERIC.

Program goals only briefly referenced in Part I would be specified in more detail in Part II. "Value Orientations" are also included to point out how the program responded to a certain set of value orientations. For example, if a community was very concerned about intellectual integrity of a program, a consumer would look carefully at this category for such information. "Problem Areas" refers to the need for information describing why a program was developed, as LEA's are basically looking for programs that were intiated to solve problems similar to their own.

The category, "Characteristics of Program Integrity" is meant to describe the essence of the program which is necessary to maintain its integrity when exported to a new setting. Since most consumers adapt programs to suit their own needs, they should be aware of what is flexible about the program, as well as the kind of methodology, hardware, and personnel costs that are essential components in the program design. A statement by the program developer concerning the community and contextual/environmental variables, as well as the social and personal value biases of the educational practice, was also viewed as necessary information for the potential user.

The "Type of Evaluation" was felt to be one of the most essential elements in the list which would clarify the kind of evaluation data that exists about the program. A checklist was suggested so that readers would know specifically what type of evaluation was conducted. Examples given were: standardized tests, criterion referenced tests, interviews, etc.

The conference recognized the difficulties that providing the comprehensive information would present, particularly for local school staff. However, the format is seen as establishing necessary standards to ensure the informations usefulness; thus outside technical assistance or other resources should be available to LEA's to meet the information requirements.

The Selection of Promising Practices to Match LEA Needs

Recommendations:

1. Two major categories of promising practices need to be developed. One would include information on programs that have been validated; the other category would be a comprehensive file, with promising practices selected as alternatives on the basis of screening criteria, but for which validation data on outcomes is not yet available.

2. NIE should work in partnership with States and other agencies to ensure that the processes for identifying promising practices and the criteria for nomination and selection are consistent, and reflect the range of promising practices rather than only national priorities.

The recommendations concerning the selection of promising practices to match LEA needs are directed at insuring that there is access to the full range of educational ideas and approaches. Participants were very sensitive to the reality that promising educational practices include a multiplicity of outcomes, for which no adequate evaluation measures may be available, and that little or no money existed for LEA's to conduct evaluations. Both the possibility of overly restrictive selection criteria, and the current inconsistencies among different States and programs over what is meant by "promising," require resolution.

Categories for Selecting Promising Practices. The concept basic to this recommendation is that different categories of promising practices exist, which meet different needs, and therefore, practices should be selected according to somewhat different criteria.

A source of frustration to LEA's is having to confront the sheer volume of promising practices in an unorganized fashion. But eliminating all access to those programs for which there is no existing evidence of effectiveness also results in an equal degree of frustration. LEA's tend to view the application of rigorous student outcome criteria alone for screening promising practices as preventing them from making their own judgement about a program's quality and effectiveness.

The need for alternative promising practices formed a large part of the discussions about selection criteria and what LEA's want. The

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local administrator would like access to an organized collection of alternatives to provide him with a frame of reference, an idea of what is "possible" in meeting a given problem. The relative effectiveness of one approach over another is unimportant at this point, because he is not committed to a given approach, or even to changing his program. Promising practices information, at this stage, appears to meet the need for understanding one's options, prior to a decision to solve the problem.

This use of promising practices information may lead to a decision to adopt a particular program, or to develop one by combining a number of components. In either case, it is substantially different from seeking out an effective approach in a given area. Therefore, two major categories are suggested as offering an effective way to begin organizing the current mass of promising practices information, as well as also meeting the need for more alternative programs. The two categories were termed the "Effective File" and the Alternative File," as shown below in Exhibit 4.

Effective File	Alternative File
Effectiveness validated by specific outcome data.	Descriptions of alternative approaches organized by problem or need addressed.
←	Resources enabling movement to Effective File.

Exhibit 4. Categories for Promising Practices Information

Programs in the effective file would have documented evidence of their effectiveness. Additional subdivisions of this category might be useful, but basically, all would meet commonly accepted standards of evaluative research. Examples of existing collections that are judged to fit into the effective category include current USOE projects to identify and package exemplary programs in compensatory education (Project Information Packages) and reading (Right to Read-sponsored efforts to disseminate successful reading programs). Various collections of alternatives exist now in information centers and at State levels in such documents as PACE (a publication of Pennsylvania Title III program), and the ALERT catalog, published by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

The alternative file (or comprehensive file) would have criteria that: 1) would ensure some quality control, 2) screen out programs not of substantial interest, or that lack documentation and evidence of something "exportable". Nomination by a professional outside the program (and LEA) was suggested as one important screening technique.

The controversy concerning the question of whether programs with no evidence of impact on student outcomes should be selected and disseminated, can be resolved by understanding that:

1 LEA's do have the responsibility for finally judging a program's worth;

2 Promising practices information is useful to LEA's when considering a wide range of ideas, alternative approaches and new programs focused in a single problem area; as well as when seeking a single, "exemplary" model;

3 Funds are not presently available to validate more than a handful of promising practices. Thus, hard data on outcomes will not exist in the near future for most promising practices, for reasons entirely unrelated to their value or "promise."

As a large number of promising practices would be eligible for consideration, the alternative files might be best kept at the State level, rather than storing the practices in a national clearinghouse. A common format, therefore, is essential to this file in order to allow LEA's to compare alternative approaches to the same problem. If a common format for information was made available, a number of criteria based on professional judgment and acceptable to both the producer and consumer could be built into the procedures for entry into a file.

Consistent Processes and Criteria. The lack of consistency in the identification, nomination, validation and/or selection of promising practices is a major barrier to increased use, and is a primary source of frustration to everyone. The lack of common standards that local educators, State departments of education, and Federal agencies all agree to results in the identification of many programs which do not deserve recognition, while many others remain unrecognized and inaccessible. In addition, Federal funds frequently are tied to current national priorities that tend to change quickly and arbitrarily, particularly from the LEA point of view. Therefore, it was felt that criteria for eligibility as a promising practice should ensure that a representative range of educational programs is reflected and screened into the various files.

General agreement was voiced that the selection process should take place at the State level and feed into the Federal level. Federal-level personnel normally do not see practices in action; therefore, it seems the proper job of States to screen for effective or alternative programs and practices. This places responsibility on the States finding a mechanism to keep in touch with local programs and practices. Suggestions of how this might be accomplished were: 1) through nomination of a program either by the developer or by someone else selected to do so, or 2) through a selection group created at the State level consisting of all parties involved in such programs and

and practices (higher education, teacher unions, and State and local representatives). This group could identify two types of programs: one set of programs which would meet very specific validation criteria; a second set would be identified as alternatives meeting only broad criteria for quality control.

NIE was viewed as responsible for suggesting to States that they develop a selection procedure for identifying effective programs. NIE's leadership is needed to help stimulate such a process, especially in areas where efforts currently do not exist.

Training for LEA Staff

Recommendation:

Funds and training should be provided to State and sub-State levels so they may assist LEA's in becoming aware of information about promising programs and in implementing selected programs. Outside facilitators should be trained and provided to help schools identify needs, to help them identify possible solutions, and to help them install programs and practices.

Training for local educators is recommended as a strategy for increasing both initial use, in the sense of seeking out information, and also facilitating greater implementation by adoption or adaption of programs or practices after a decision has been made. This system of training would focus on increasing the LEA's capability to use all types of promising practices information which is or will be made available.

The type of training recommended would focus on the use of new materials or programs, on curriculum design and development, and on needs assessment. These skills are the necessary prerequisites for local educators to effectively use promising practices information. Neither pre-service nor in-service training for teachers currently prepares teachers for the specific strategies to cope with changes. Training of administrators frequently omits preparation for the development of program planning skills, and orientation toward using outside information and resources. Rather than continuing to label local educators as "resistant to change", participants recommended that NIE support efforts to assist more of them to learn the skills needed to plan for and carry out change. This recommendation is not focused on training all teachers and principals to become "change agents", but to provide the awareness and skills which allows them to seek out help, information, or assistance from change agents. Thus, training is not meant to imply training for a specific program, but rather to include overall skills which could be applied to the development, adoption or adaption of any program.

State agencies, regional service centers and universities are viewed as having primary responsibility for carrying out training. Both on-site training, and training held at information resource centers were suggested. Many of the information centers represented at the conference conduct active training programs that bring local educators into the center, where they can explore the materials and ideas available to them. However, travel constraints and the initial reluctance of many LEA's to spend money for such training are arguments offered in favor of training in local school districts.

An important second phase of this recommendation points to the need for the training of facilitators who can offer technical assistance directly to the schools. A major problem encountered by local schools is the matching of available materials to their particular needs. It was suggested that two types of facilitators would help solve this problem; one facilitator could act as a resource person informing the schools of what is available, and subsequently assisting to create a climate of readiness; and a second facilitator could provide necessary assistance in the implementation of a suitable program.

A Cooperative Network

Recommendation:

NIE should facilitate and provide leadership for the development of a network of various agencies at all levels of the educational system in order to increase the development, dissemination and utilization of promising practices information.

This recommendation developed from a strong consensus that the first step to increase the use of promising practices information is to organize a constituency that includes all the necessary agencies who now have or should have some responsibility in this area. NIE needs to develop a process which will facilitate interaction with this "collection" of agencies, and which will allow a thinking through of the relationships, roles, and approach capabilities required. This recommendation resulted from the struggle to resolve several problems:

1. How can NIE impact on all 18,000 local education districts in an effective way, and yet not "bypass" important political agencies in the education system?
2. How can presently competing power groups become involved in a cooperative system?
3. What can NIE accomplish when it currently has very limited financial and staff resources to work with?

Exhibit 5, NIE's Relationship with Various Agencies in Developing a Cooperative Network, identifies those agencies that have a significant role in the area of increasing the use of promising practices information. The arrows indicate an initial visualization of NIE relationships with other agencies, intermediate units which serve a number of individual school districts, and large city school systems which serve major student populations. The solid arrows indicate a direct or formal relationship; the dashed lines indicate an informal, or purely informational relationship.

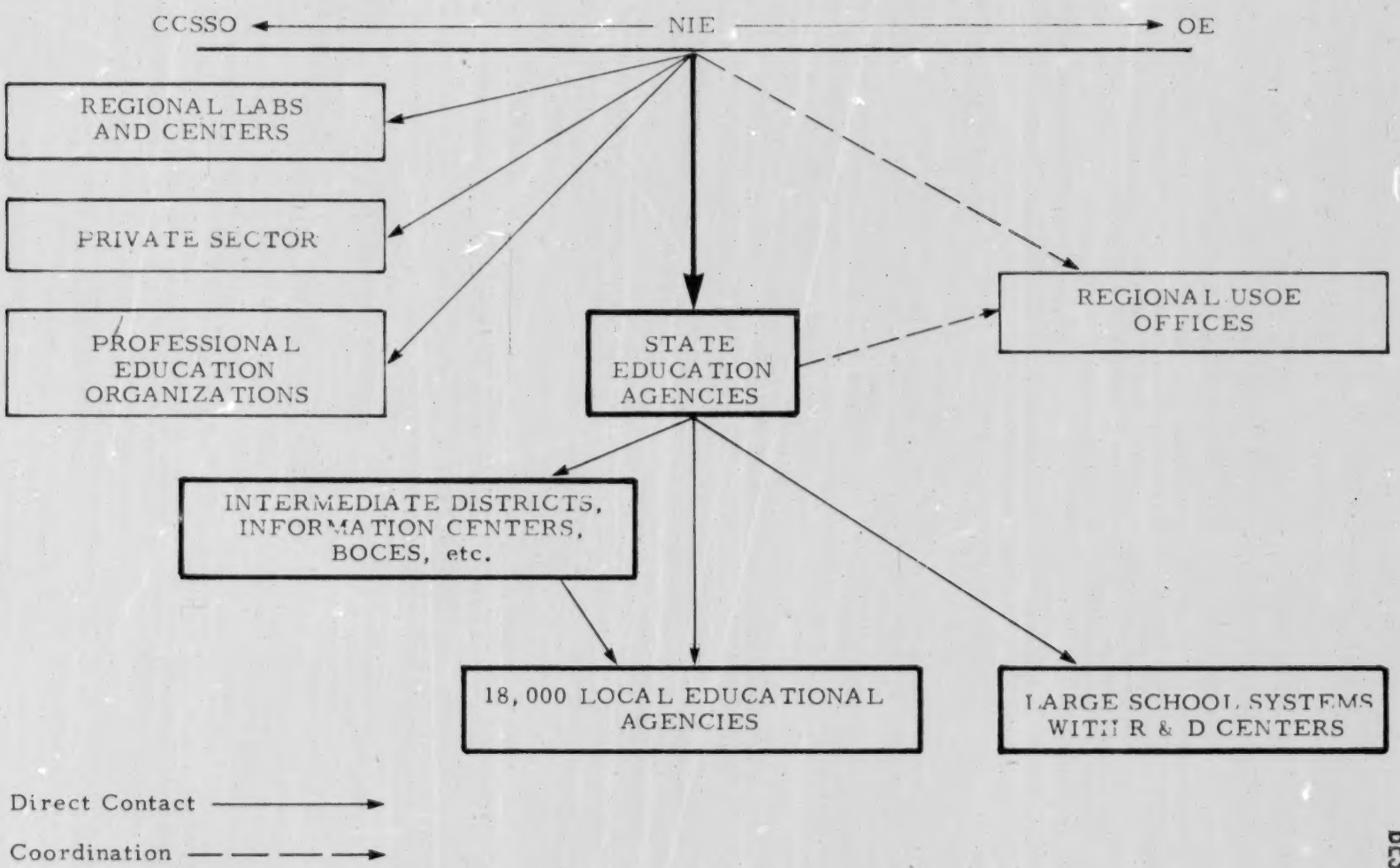

Exhibit 5. NIE's Relationship with Various Agencies in Developing a Cooperative Network

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This visual picture of a potential network initially conceived in terms of "dissemination" evolved to include the functions of information development and validation of promising practices, as well as providing technical assistance in implementation.

Three specific steps are strongly recommended to NIE as strategies for implementing this recommendation.

- Step 1: NIE should convene an initial workshop with key staff from NIE, the U.S. Office of Education, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in order to develop support for this proposed network of agencies. This workshop would serve to ensure agency commitment, clarify different areas of responsibility, and to identify individuals and agencies that should be involved at other levels.
- Step 2: A Task Force, resulting from the initial workshop, should plan workshops to be held at the State level, and determine the financial support and resources (people and techniques), that would be needed by the States.
- Step 3: Each State should be invited to hold a State workshop utilizing the support and resources developed by the Task Force, and to develop an operational plan for a state network for the purpose of information development, validation, dissemination and utilization of promising practices information. A suggested but less desirable alternative would be to set up a pilot study with a few States, asking them to develop a planning model which other States might follow in the future.

Exhibit 6, Workshop Planning Matrix for Developing a State Model, indicates the potential functional or operational roles that must be assumed in order to increase the use of promising practices information. The need to clarify these roles in order to reduce the power struggles between different levels of the educational system is a major concern of this recommendation. At present, the State

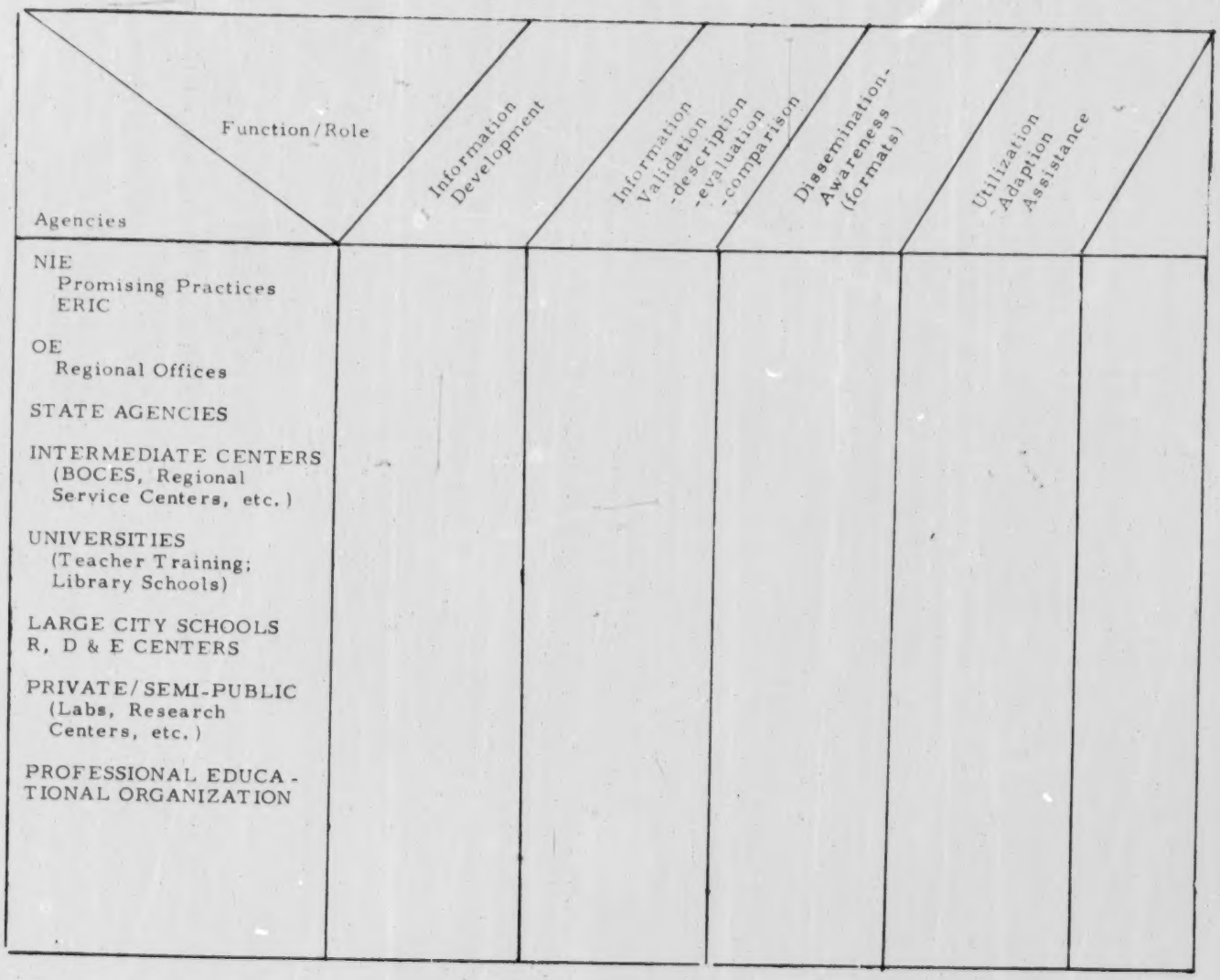

Exhibit 6. Workshop Planning Matrix for Developing a State Model

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education agency and within-State information centers are potentially competing for major roles in dissemination. An honest assessment of the State-level capability to serve a central collection-dissemination function is critical; the State should have first option to take on leadership as the central agency in collection and dissemination. If it chooses, it may pass operational responsibility on to an information center (such as RISE or SMERC), or to a State-funded regional service center (as in Texas) that already has the capability.

In order to carry out each of the responsibilities mentioned, each State would have to initiate new discussion and definition of its capabilities. This would result in the development of a unique plan for each State suited to its own individual configuration.

State-of-the-Art Study

Recommendation:

NIE should conduct a systematic study of previous and on-going efforts to develop and disseminate promising practices information, including those programs that assist LEA's directly in needs assessment, access to relevant information, and technical assistance in utilization. This state-of-the-art study is action research necessary for effective program planning at all levels, and should therefore directly involve local, State and various Federal agencies and programs. The state-of-the-art study should be the basis for an overall, long-range plan of action for the management of promising practices information; the study and plan of action should be disseminated for mutual implementation to various local, State, and Federal agencies and programs.

The need for a state-of-the-art study to document and clarify what is already known is essential, before NIE proceeds to develop new "systems" models, or long-range strategies. The conference participants came reasonably up-to-date about their areas of concern, and still found that the value and diversity of the experience from across the country was far greater than they had expected. This encounter re-emphasized the fact that "re-inventing the wheel" is also a problem for those involved in dissemination, and led to a stress on the value of drawing from already existing resources, as NIE develops some type of new coordinated system.

Implicit in the thinking of many participants was the concern that a greater number of competitive or mutually exclusive dissemination systems might emerge, resulting in one for ERIC for promising practices, one for R & D products from the educational labs and centers, in addition to the existing Title III dissemination efforts, and the specialized networks (i.e., vocational education curriculum network). A strong point of the conference was that investigating what has already been done is a serious and critical first step NIE needs to undertake The study would be a valuable resource in preparing a solid foundation for systematic planning by NIE and others, particularly at the State level.

The recommendation for a state-of-the-art study is clearly not a recommendation for compilation of research or existing literature, but a study of the previous and on-going operational efforts (in which partipants are individually involved) to collect and disseminate locally-developed programs and practices. Participants specifically referred to a number of examples: the State efforts under Title III sponsorship; the experience of the various ERIC centers in disseminating information about subject areas (science, social studies); and the recent efforts performed by private contractors for both USOE and NIE to identify, validate and disseminate exemplary educational programs developed by local districts.

The state-of-the-art study which would begin immediately would be an action study, that would only be successful if the field is directly involved in a corollary "political process." The unsatisfactory record of such studies in helping educational practioners is a result of ignoring the people and political relationships which are essential to evolving coordinated, cooperative action based on the study itself. Therefore, as part of this recommendation it is suggested that NIE enter into a partnership with all education levels to conduct a state-of-the-art study, and to develop its long-range plans.

Evaluation of the Impact of Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information

Recommendations:

1. The impact of disseminating promising practices information should be explored in order to develop criteria for judging the effectiveness of dissemination. Three areas of potential impact which need to be explored include (1) awareness; (2) decisions to adopt or adapt a given program; and (3) relationship of the dissemination and information to program success at the adopting site.

2. An in-depth case study is needed to determine if a high level of "use" of promising practices information by LEA's has an impact (1) on actual classroom instruction, and (2) on student outcomes.

Evaluation activities might seem only indirectly related to the problems of increasing the use of promising practices information. Participants, however, felt there was a critical long-range need for a clear specification of the outcomes of dissemination activities, and for an in-depth study of whether or not promising practices information impacted on students.

Long-range development of a coordinated system requires an immediate concern about how a system can be judged to be effective. In addition, decision-makers at all governmental levels who support dissemination will expect results from the resources and efforts put into dissemination. These improvements will require a clear definition of goals and criteria for evaluating whether goals have been achieved.

Suggested Areas for Exploration. The areas specified in the recommendation resulted from extensive workshop discussions over the need for evaluating the effectiveness of dissemination in terms of what is meaningful to the consumer at the LEA level. The areas constitute those about which the participants felt most attention should be paid, and relationships explored in order to develop criteria for measuring the full potential of information services.

The creation of a greater awareness about available resources and information is seen as a major, and measurable outcome of a dissemination system. Most LEA staff are not aware of the information resources and services already available to help them meet their needs; this lack of awareness continues to be a problem and thus of major concern even for a comprehensive information center serving an identified target audience. It was felt that efforts to increase the awareness of local educators about information resources would constitute a valid area for exploration and development of specific criteria.

The actual use of information in local decision-making is the second area requiring exploration. Participants were particularly concerned that the use of promising practices information itself should be separated from actual adoption. The validity of rational decision for "non-adoption" of a program based on information from a dissemination system is often overlooked or viewed as negative, and does not "count" when questions are raised concerning the "effectiveness" of a dissemination system. Measures for such variables as the adequacy of the information for decision-making process are needed.

The third area would be an exploration of the relationship between dissemination processes and information content, and the success of program implementation. The question raised is whether a dissemination system can or should be evaluated in relation to the effectiveness of program implementation. Some of the questions to be answered are how the quality of the information, or of information services themselves, affect eventual success in implementation.

In-Depth Case Study of the Impact of Disseminating Promising Practices Information. A basic assumption about promising practices is they they will make a difference for teachers, and for students, if they can be effectively disseminated. But how do we know? The recommendation was discussed as possibly a regional study, in a multi-State area that has achieved a significant level or "threshold" of dissemination activity (New England was suggested). The study would

attempt to determine the observable effects on students, perhaps in the form of disproving the null hypothesis: that no differences occur as a result of this activity. The study would in effect be a test of whether the investment in promising practices information can be justified.

The case study was seen as a significant contribution to the state of the art, as participants felt it should examine what components of dissemination produced desired outcomes.

This recommendation might be viewed as contributing to the increased use of promising practices by building a more rational foundation for the activities of professionals in this field -- the linking agents and information specialists at all levels, and for program managers at State and Federal levels who must justify budget requests. Rather than meeting an "immediate need", the case study is an essential step for long-range planning.

ANALYSIS

A major portion of the conference discussions involved examining the implications of specific strategies. This section, based on review of the discussion tapes and recorder notes, is intended to provide some perspective on the recommendations as initial steps in relation to the overall goal of increasing the use of promising practices information.

The Nature of the Recommendations

The recommendations carry some general implications for the type of action that is needed; these implications can be summarized as:

- The need for a common knowledge base concerning local education agency decision-making practices.
- The need for defining roles and responsibilities in relation to shared objectives, in order to develop mutual accountability.
- The need for an open and interactive system of communication about this and other problems so that information about failure and success can be shared.
- The need for long-range planning and consistent, mutually acceptable management procedures for the existing "system", before a major increase in funds can be well-spent.

Roles and Responsibilities

The strongest implications in the recommendations concerns the roles the various governmental levels should assume in increasing the use of promising practices information. This subsection draws together the major concerns of participants regarding the roles of

NIE, the States, local education agencies, information centers and universities. The order of their discussion is for convenience, rather than indicating a hierarchy of importance.

The Role of NIE. The role NIE should play was by far the area of greatest agreement: NIE is seen as providing the leadership to coordinate the efforts of all of the agencies and systems involved with promising practices information.

The role of NIE was described by a number of key terms: as a "facilitator," "mediator," "coordinator," and in "partnership" with all other levels of the educational system. These terms help define NIE's leadership role in the area of promising practices, and more broadly, in the whole area of dissemination of educational information.

Those involved in this area realized they cannot "coordinate themselves," particularly at the State level, or among the diverse information centers and services. The potential for NIE leadership appears enormous and is enhanced because NIE is seen not as a program and guideline-oriented agency, but one mandated and free to work in partnership with all governmental and private levels in developing policies and implementing new approaches.

The leadership role for NIE cuts across all of the areas related to the greater utilization of promising practices information. This broad responsibility, and the interdependence of different functions such as dissemination, or identification and selection, implies that NIE should not concentrate all of its resources on one functional activity.

The essence of this leadership role is to facilitate the acceptance of responsibilities and the commitment of resources by other agencies, at other levels. Perhaps part of the rationale for the conference not recommending any major new Federal funding for this area stems

from their concern that State departments of education, national and regional information services and centers should assume responsibilities in this area, responsibility which total Federal funding might reduce.

The Role of the States. Instead of envisioning a national-level system in collecting and disseminating promising practices information, the conference viewed the collection and dissemination of promising practices information as a function involving State education agencies very directly. There can be no single model for all States, and therefore, no specific prescriptions as to what the State agencies "should do" but the States are seen as the pivotal agency. There was strong consensus among LEA's, information centers, and national educational program specialists, that all SEA's could take on a stronger coordinating role to increase the use of promising practices information.

Most of the recommendations would strengthen the SEA's role and responsibilities, and facilitate a positive role for them in information collection and dissemination. The SEA's are envisioned working as partners with NIE to establish consistent selection processes and criteria, and to develop and implement a common format for promising practices information. The need for quality control could thus be best met by State-level action.

The general responsibility of SEA's to take on a coordinating role in this area reflects the changing functions of the SEA's. Representatives at the conference, from all levels, saw the SEA as moving toward developing the capabilities to assist local school districts in the overall management of education. This change from a traditional, largely regulatory role toward an interactive, service-oriented role includes dissemination of information as one specific component, but linked into a comprehensive set of services.

The Role of the LEA. Local education agencies have a twofold responsibility in increasing the use of promising practices information. As participants in the planning process the input of LEA representatives is critical to understanding user needs and developing specific steps to implement recommendations. As consumers, the implications for increasing use will require improvement in local capabilities to utilize promising practices information.

A diversity of LEA's must be represented within the kind of integrated, multi-level planning exemplified by the conference. Their concerns and requirements need to be heard directly by decision-makers at other levels and made part of an integrated plan. They should not be asked to serve together as a separate advisory body.

The major implication for all local education agencies as information consumers is their need to assume a greater responsibility in the initial process of identifying goals and assessing needs for information. The lack of on-going needs assessment was identified as one of the greatest constraints on the eventual utilization of information. An additional responsibility implied by the recommendation for a common format would be to increase the LEA's capability as the initial producer of information. To meet this requirement, however, it is clear there must be additional resources, incentives and training for local staff.

A final and most crucial responsibility is to establish the standards for accountability for other agencies and institutions that provide LEA's with information services and technical assistance. As LEA's begin to develop strong planning/management systems and become accountable to their own parent or community advisory committees, the LEA is in a position to develop criteria for evaluating services provided by State and Federal agencies. The need for accountability between levels became very evident during the conference, as LEA's began identifying what they required. It should be emphasized that the standards LEA's use to specify information needed from other levels

(in order to meet the objectives they have set for themselves) are stated in terms of the effective delivery of resources and services, not "Why isn't there more money available?"

The Information Centers. Two basic types of information centers were represented at the conference and were seen as having different responsibilities in increasing the use of promising practices information.

An information center at a national level would appear to improve the quality of information about a subject or content area, serve as a central resource for not only State and sub-State information services in the area, but also serve LEA's interested and motivated to contact them. Some ERIC Clearinghouses have developed strong information resource centers that collect, disseminate locally-developed educational practices along with other information, and provide some direct technical assistance.

The information centers operating at a State or sub-State level were seen as providing LEA's with a comprehensive range of information services. In implementing the recommendations to increase the use of promising practices information, these information centers could take on the responsibility of testing out new formats, and determining user-oriented criteria for selecting different types of promising practices for different uses. Their direct contact with a population of LEA's could be used to provide direct feedback to the national level on suggested improvements.

Within an improved and coordinated system, the role of regional or local information centers would include more involvement with LEA's in the identification and development of promising practices information for selection into various collections. Where such centers already exist, or may be initiated, they are the critical mediators linking the user of information to more remote resources. The information center that can work directly and continuously with LEA staff has a unique and powerful role to play in facilitating systematic changes and increased competence in problem-solving among local education agencies.

The University. University Schools of Education can have a much greater role to play in facilitating the use of educational information, primarily because of the new responsibilities LEA's must assume in utilizing outside knowledge. Within the context of a coordinated system, the potential responsibilities for the university include technical assistance to school systems, training of educators as information users, as well as becoming the site of an active information service for surrounding LEA's.

Universities serve as traditional sources of information for educators, and many schools of education are now repositories of ERIC microfiche collections. The need for more direct information services might be met in many areas by the development of a university-based, user-responsive information service for local schools. Such a center could become part of student training experience, and then serve as a known resource to draw upon once in the field.

Additional Implications for Implementation

In summary, the recommendations can be examined in terms of financial requirements, and for their sequence in time.

The effect of the workshop process, and of the diverse and experienced group of participants, was to focus discussions on identifying strategies having greatest possibility of realistic implementation within known constraints, rather than on more idealistic possibilities. The conference was particularly sensitive to the realities of NIE's limited financial resources, and therefore, specific recommendations tend to be strategies that could be initiated with limited funding.

The apparent feasibility of the recommendations in terms of financial costs is balanced by an increased need for cooperative action and coordination of resources from other agencies and groups at all levels. The implications for NIE's planning process appears to be that its available funds should be directed toward facilitating the cooperative processes essential to implementation.

The recommendations developed have been presented as separate strategies in response to priority problems. However, the degree of success of implementing any given recommendation would appear to be highly dependent on coordination with strategies to resolve other problems. In effect, the interdependence of the specific problems in this area implies that even minimal attention across all problems in the immediate future would ensure more overall impact, rather than focusing on only one identified problem, such as the need for a common format, outside the context of a plan of action.

This interdependence suggests that implementation of the recommendations would have a maximum impact if it could occur in the following sequence:

1. Development and sharing of an initial plan of action;
2. Organization of a task force for planning a cooperative network;
3. Organization of representative task forces for developing user-specific categories, formats, and criteria and processes for promising practices information;
4. Outlining the scope of a state-of-the-art study and developing support for its results;
5. Initiation of the state-of-the-art study and case study to analyze impact of increased use;
6. Incorporation of initial products of items 3, 4, and 5 into the workshops for developing state networks;
7. Revision of plan of action based on a state-of-the-art study.

This organizational sequence envisions the initiation of planning processes that would focus on each given issue or problem identified by this conference after a general framework had been established. All these initial efforts would need to feed back into an on-going planning process for the developing state-of-the-art study.

III. CRI OBSERVATIONS

The conference proved rich in both the quality and quantity of discussions, and generated more information related to new insights and conclusions than could be incorporated into specific recommendations. From these discussions CRI has formulated additional observations, and suggestions which are offered here for consideration.

The first part of this section presents suggestions based on our analysis of the conference data and additional information provided directly by participants. The suggestions are offered because we believe part of our responsibility as a third party resource is to learn as much as we can, and to document and share with decision-makers in NIE and elsewhere the results of this experience. The CRI recommendations are in no way "alternatives" to the major conference recommendations; we hope they will be helpful in understanding how particular recommendations might be implemented, and what additional efforts might be considered.

The section concludes with observations on the success of the conference in meeting its objectives, and the potential value for improving education that CRI sees resulting from the efforts to increase the use of promising practices information.

SUGGESTIONS

The following section presents CRI's suggestions drawn from the conference experience. We realize that some of what is stated here may have already been explored or suggested, but because of the diverse audience that this report will reach, we feel it is useful to present and re-emphasize these points.

Task Force

NIE should consider development of an on-going Task Force of people similar to those invited to this initial conference, to work as a joint planning body across all problem areas related to promising practices information. This might include those already identified in the recommendation for developing a cooperative network and include a significant number of representatives from LEA's as well as representatives from all agencies and government levels.

Workshops on LEA Use

NIE might consider holding additional exploratory workshops focused on the use of promising practices information by local education agencies. Workshops could be held rather easily and quickly by re-involving some of the original conference participants and drawing in a new, broader range of local educators. The workshops should involve LEA representatives who are less experienced in their orientation toward information resources and their use in program planning, and who can thus help pinpoint more barriers to increased use. This would be helpful in focusing the initial planning and raising more basic questions that need to be answered.

Information Systems Education

NIE should begin to develop long-range plans for educating local school staff in the use of new information systems -- in terms of the concepts implicit in whatever formats are used, for identification and selection of promising practices information.

Handbook on ERIC Use

NIE may wish to consider developing a handbook or user's guide that illustrates how promising practices information can be accessed from the existing information system. This might facilitate increased use of the existing ERIC system. Most local educators may not have direct access to ERIC files; however, developing and testing such a handbook would provide an indication of whether direct access is a feasible option.

Federal Funds for State Use

NIE should explore the possibilities of setting aside Federal funds for State-level efforts to identify, select and disseminate promising practices information, as it may not be possible to resolve at the Federal level current conflicts over the effect of Federal priorities and the application of regorous standards.

Case Study on Problem-Solving

NIE should consider supporting a study on the impact of providing comprehensive information services on local school processes for problem-solving and decisions to improve educational programs. Information center staffs indicate the dynamic changes occur in the nature of the requests from superintendents, principals, and teachers as they begin experiencing the usefulness of information provided in response to initial requests.

The case study could provide documentation of how change occurs in actual settings, as well as the relative degree of change, achieved through contact with an information center. This study would explore linkage to an information center as an alternative to other strategies for improving local school management of the educational process.

Additional Information Centers

NIE should explore alternatives for developing new information centers without initial high level Federal Funding. The development of additional information centers responsive to local education agency needs appears to be an essential step in building an effective system for the dissemination and utilization of all educational knowledge. Centers that depend on local rather than Federal support would ensure that local needs are being met.

Several possible "models" already exist, and would appear to be equally viable. One is the cooperative center, supported and governed by neighboring school districts. It provides a comprehensive range of services in program planning, staff training and information resources

to member districts. A second model is a more independent information center, partially attached to a local or intermediate education unit, and providing a variety of information services to any education agencies that wish to purchase them. A third model would appear to include regional service centers supported by State funds, providing services to all local education agencies in their area.

Technical Assistance

A critical problem LEA's continue to confront is the lack of technical assistance. Actual use of promising practices information is critically dependent on technical assistance -- in other words, people -- to provide for needs assessment, help in adapting specific approaches and in evaluation. NIE should consider instituting a review of policies at Federal and State levels to ensure that resources are not expended in the development and dissemination of promising practices information, without providing for specific technical assistance to local schools in using such information.

Training

In order to support the recommendation on training, NIE should explore the current education of teachers in pre-service and in-service and of educational administrators, to determine their current levels of awareness regarding the utilization of information in solving educational problems. The development of coordinated dissemination/diffusion systems to meet LEA needs will require a simultaneous effort to reach and educate local educators in the existence, purpose, and use of such systems.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this report, CRI would like to offer some observations on the success of the conference, and on the value of increasing the use of promising practices information.

The objectives NIE established for this conference were that it identify those factors that currently prevent increased use of promising practices information, and recommend strategies for increasing such use.

The conference recommendations, and the insights into the nature of the problem which it has provided would seem to have met these objectives with a reasonable degree of success.

As would be anticipated from a group of professionals who are confronted with the daily pressures of meeting the demands of colleagues in the field, there appeared to be a great pressure initially to define needs in terms of what he (or she) needed to help perform on-the-job tomorrow.

The fact that the participants proceeded in this fashion suggests that any analysis of needs in the future probably should be divided into: 1) immediate needs of those who have responsibilities in this area, and 2) long-range needs of the field of education with regard to the development and diffusion of "promising practices." Needs in both these areas should be clarified -- recognizing that some needs in each area may be mutually exclusive and that where the same need exists in connection with both immediate and long-range planning, the priority of importance with regard to meeting the need may differ. For example, the need for standardizing format may be a high priority item from the perspective of immediate needs, but may be a much lower priority item with reference to long-range planning.

The support by participants for a major state-of-the-art study reflects their recognition that the discussions could only scratch the surface of some problems, and that many basic issues would not be addressed.

The conference facilitated additional outcomes which are more difficult to document, but which may be of equal or greater value than the immediate recording of its stated products in this report. The workshop process resulted in a personal involvement and commitment by participants as a consequence of their efforts. Thus, a concern developed and was expressed at the last session over whether there would be an opportunity for participants to remain involved with NIE in planning and decision-making.

A positive outcome of this was that participants who had identified resources from other levels or agencies held their own group strategy sessions before leaving the conference. One of these has already resulted in a pilot effort to coordinate information resources among several States and information centers. A longer conference would have allowed such multi-level planning to have been incorporated and documented.

From CRI's perspective as a third-party resource, the conference demonstrated convincingly that joint planning across governmental levels can be a viable and effective process. It demonstrated the necessity for all levels to be directly involved and interacting with each other rather than always remaining in role groups. And it demonstrated the potential for NIE to continue this effort in educational leadership, working cooperatively with its constituency.

The Value of Increasing the Use of Promising Practices Information. Educational policy-makers at any level need to justify resources for increasing the use of promising practices information by showing how it will lead to improvement in the practice of education itself.

The usual assumption has been that promising practices represent successful field-tested approaches which will improve education for children when disseminated and adopted by other schools. The tentative conclusion CRI has drawn as to the value of promising practices information challenges this basic assumption and the processes created by the use of this information that will make the greatest impact in educational practice.

NIE faces the challenge of assisting 18,000 local school districts, traditionally autonomous, to improve their educational programs. A coordinated information system for sharing information about success and failure of local educational efforts can provide local educators the kind of continued learning process they need. The specific bits of information in the system -- the individual strategies or practices -- become less important than the cognitive framework they provide as a whole. Such a

learning system can only come about if local educators are involved as producers as well as consumers of information, if the local school comes to see itself as a valuable resource for the information it possesses about educational practice.

APPENDIX

List of Participants

List of Facilitators

Summary of Conference Working Paper

Problems Hindering the Use of Promising Practices Information

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Conference Facilitators

Dr. Howard Adelman, Director of the Fernald School, University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Adelman's background includes development, implementation and evaluation of reading programs to present reading failure; development of a model for planning competency-based teacher training; and extensive consulting in education of the handicapped and learning disabled.

Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, Dean of Education, San Francisco State University, has been extensively involved in designing and implementing multi-cultural teacher education programs; and development and evaluation of various curriculum and educational programs. Other areas Dr. Hilliard specializes in are the gifted student, assessment, and personality and teaching effectiveness.

Mr. Ron Lopez, Senior Consultant, Contemporary Research, Inc., has developed and disseminated Chicano study programs at secondary and university levels throughout California, and conducted in-service teacher training for new multi-cultural math and reading programs. He was a member of the Chancellor's Task Force on the Urban Crisis to Higher Education and served as a consultant to the California State Legislature to develop a plan for increasing opportunities for Chicanos in California institutions of higher education.

Ms. Diane Watson, Senior Consultant, Contemporary Research, Inc., is currently a co-principal investigator for CRI's study of exemplary vocational education programs for minority students conducted for the State of California. She has been a specialist in Health Careers Education for the Allied Health Professions Project in Los Angeles and has recently directed the development of new health career programs for high schools in California. She has been extensively involved with the problems of determining local educational policies and developing programs for community involvement.

Summary of Conference Working Paper

As a preparation for the conference, CRI asked participants to provide information on the current problems they experience, and practices or other activities related to the LEA use of promising practices information. Participants were asked to identify specific problems which they felt hindered the use of promising practices information, in order to determine any pre-existing consensus or obvious biasing towards any one aspect of the problem (Exhibit A). Quick analysis revealed that critical problems were perceived in every area. A slight majority indicated that the utilization/adoption aspect was the greatest problem area, rather than information development or dissemination -- a fact which proved to be true at the conference.

The information was particularly helpful in two ways: 1) it provided the understanding of the participants' concerns and diversity of experience to structure the agenda and discussion groups; 2) problems and concerns, as well as the experiences, could be shared among the participants prior to the conference by means of a working paper prepared by CRI. This gave participants a frame of reference and a point to move from the start of the conference.

Problems Hindering the Use of Promising Practices Information

Problems In Information Development

Descriptions/Formats
Personal time
Priority
Use of media
Program interference
Packaging
Funds
Needs assessment
Validation instrument
Quality - program/products
Selection/Criteria/Evaluation data
Production facilities
Systematization
AV production/Formatting
National coordination
Staff
Incentives
Know-how
Technical assistance
Provincialism
Identification procedures
Duplication

Problems With Dissemination/Awareness

Project capability
Dissemination/Awareness
Time
Knowledge of resources
Quality of descriptions
New money
Present means too expensive
External validity
Criteria for reporting
Technical personnel for promotion
Trained field/linking agents
Federal/State/District commitment
Media
Identifying local district gatekeepers
Coverage to teachers
Descriptions/Format
Interest/Motivation/Incentives
Central source
Funding or creating channels
Timeliness
Concern about needs of other LEA's
In-service training
Communications network
Planning/Assessment
Assessment of critical information needs
Interaction between developer/disseminator

Problems with Utilization/Adaption

Technical assistance
Product form (inflexible, ambiguous)
Money
Inertia
Sense of ownership
Preparation of materials
Change agent
Credibility
Implementation assistance
Generalizability
Teacher time
State/District commitment
Incentive/Motivation
Target audience
Alternatives
Matching new practices to existing needs
Knowledge/Comprehension/Utilization of services
Needs assessment
New approaches
New ways to make decisions
Leadership
Demonstration sites
Distance between user and developer
Interaction between user and developer